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ABSTRACT

Results are reported of a study to determine whether sexism is an outgrowth of racism, using the variables of social class, general conservatism, and economic traditionalism. The sample consisted of 522 students (47% female, 53% male) in small liberal arts college. Participants were administered questionnaires by trained interviewers and data were analyzed according to path analysis. Results indicated that racism and sexism are similar. Both spring from the same psychological characteristics, both are facilitated by observable physical characteristics, and both play the same structural role in the economy of modern societies. The path analysis also revealed that the direct path from political conservatism to sexism is strong and that the general conservatism that is widespread in American society is an underlying causal element in both racism and sexism. The author concludes that rather than view people as racist or not racist, sexist or not sexist, or politically conservative or liberal, one should recognize that these are continuous variables that are present to a greater or lesser extent in all Americans. (Author/KC)

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RACISM AND SEXISM: A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSAL STRUCTURE OF ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Questions on sexism and related variables were distributed to a random sample of the student body in a small liberal arts college. The theoretical model to be tested in the study was that political conservatism and social class lead to racism and economic traditionalism, which in turn leads to sexism. Bivariate correlations between the variables were high and in the predicted direction. A path analysis resulted in some modifications, but basically upheld the model proposed. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings plus suggestions for a needed replication of the study.

INTRODUCTION

This study has its roots in two early classics of the race relations literature. First, there is the comment by Myrdal in An American Dilemma (1944) that there are many structural similarities between the situation of women and blacks in America, an insight which was not developed further until recent years. The second insight is the finding in The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford, 1950) that prejudices are not uncorrelated. That is to say, people who are highly prejudiced against one minority group tend to be similarly prejudiced against other minority groups. Taken together, these two early insights suggest that not only do women and blacks suffer many of the same injustices in American society, but these injustices tend to be supported by the same groups of people.

More recently, there have been a number of publications that relate sexism to racism in one way or another. Hacker suggested that women were a minority group in 1951, an idea that was poorly received by sociologists at that time but which has since become commonplace (Hacker, 1974). The analogy between racism and sexism was explicitedly developed by Blakey (1974). He saw three main parallels between racism and sexism: negative stereotypes, unequal protection under the law, and unequal political participation. Sedlacek and his associates at the University of Maryland compared sexist and racist attitudes, finding that men were less negative toward women than whites were toward blacks and that sexism is, in part, a negative stereotypical reaction

to any alteration in established sex role behavior (Sedlacek, Brooks, Christenson, Harway, and Merritt, 1976). They also experimented with therapeutic techiques for reducing racism and sexism (Chapman, 1974).

A number of publications that treat sex and racism took sex to mean sexual behavior rather than gender. Hernton's Sex and Racism (1965) and Stember's Sexual Racism (1978) are examples of this approach. Goldberg's investigation of personality correlates of attitudes toward women included authoritarianism, but not racism. In this study, he was forced to conclude that:

> If we are right, then, in our suggestion that sexism approaches being a culturally fixed and almost universal attitude, then it would seem that final explanations of the phenomenon are not profitably to be looked for at the level of individual psychology (Goldberg, 1974:62).

Szymanski (1974) has reviewed the classical and neo-Marxist theories of the interaction between capitalism on one hand and racism and sexism on the other. He found that between 1940 and 1970, there was increasing racial homogeneity in the working class, but continuing sexual discrimination, as measured by income, education and occupation. His conclusion was that the oppression of women by individual men was being replaced by "the socialized oppression of the corporations whose need for a particular kind of labor force may be becoming the major generating force of sexism in the society" (1974:725). Syzmanski developed these ideas further in a second article (1976) in which an ecological correlation using the fifty American states showed that income discrimination against women is inversely related to income discrimination against Third World people. He interpreted this as meaning that racial and sexual discrimination in the labor market are functionally equivalent. The operate in a similar manner and produce similar results.

The research reported in the present article paralles Szymanski's work, but differs from it in that it attempts to link racism and sexism at the social psychological level of analysis rather than at the purely social structural level of analysis. Figure 1 portrays the initial theoretical model around which the research project was developed. In this model, racism leads to sexism, but both are conditioned by a more general variable, economic traditionalism. The ideology of economic traditionalism is posited to be a derivation of two underlying variables, one ideological and one structural. They are political conservatism and social class.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

METHODOLOGY

The variables in the preliminary model were operationalized in the form of questionnaire items. Family income was used as an index of social class. Respondents were asked to rate themselves on a ten point political attitudes scale ranging from reactionary (1, 2) and conservative (3, 4) to liberal (7, 8) and radical (9, 10). The other three variables were each measured on Likert scales composed of eleven statements to which five alternative responses were possible; strongly agree, agree, uncertain or neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The racism items were adapted from the E scale created by Adorno et al. (1950), with editorial changes made in certain items to bring them up to date. Sexism was operationalized as attitudes toward women, and the attitude statements were taken from the Attitudes Toward

Women Scale (Spence and Helmreich, 1972). The economic traditionalism scale items were taken from the Economic Conservatism Scale (Rundquist and Sletto, 1936). Examples of attitude items in the three Likert scales are as follows:

Racism

To end prejudice against blacks, the first step is for blacks to get rid of their harmful and irriting faults.

Blacks are going too far when they dress lavishly and drive around in big cars.

It is hard to imagine myself marrying a person of another race.

Sexism

The husband should be regarded as the legal representative of the family in all matters of law.

It is insulting to women to have the "obey" clause remain in the marriage service. (Reversed in sense)

It is childish for a woman to assert herself by retaining her maiden name after marriage.

Economic Traditionalism

Legislatures too often pass laws to curb business freedom.

Large incomes should be taxed more than the are now. (Reversed in sense)

The more a person learns about our economic system, the less willing he or she is to see changes made.

The questionnaires were pretested on a small group of students and then administered to a 50 percent systematic random sample of full-time students at a small liberal arts college located in a western state in late 1975. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents at their residence hall rooms or off-campus apartments by specially trained research aides from a

methodology and statistics class. Each student research aide personally delivered the questionnaire, assured the respondent of anonymity, and honestly answered any questions asked about the project. To drive home the point about anonymity, a sealed box with a slit in it was displayed to each respondent with the explanation that the research aide would return in half an hour to pick up the completed questionnaire, enclosed in an unmarked envelope, which the respondent could insert directly into the sealed box. Up to five call-backs were made if respondents were initially unavailable. A total of 522 students out of 540 in the sample returned questionnaires, of which 515 more usable, a return rate of 96 percent.

The sample was composed of 47 percent women and 53 percent men. Fifty-eight percent of the students had cumulative college grade point averages of 3.0 or over, which is to be expected in an "elite" liberal arts college. Somewhat less than half of the respondents attended church as often as once a month and just over half came from families with incomes of over $25,000 a year or from towns with a population of less than 50,000. On the political values scale, 22 percent of the respondents rated themselves as reactionary or conservative, 39 percent as moderate, and 39 percent as liberal or radical.

RESULTS

In the initial stage of the analysis, bivariate tables were constructed for the major variables in the model, as well as between these variables and a number of background variables that were also included in the questionnaire. The bivariate distributions between sexism, racism and economic traditionalism are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. In general, the students were higher on economic traditionalism than sexism, and much lower on racism than on either

of them. Table 1 shows that students who are high in racism are much more likely to be high in sexism than those who are low in racism. Cutting points

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

in the racism and sexism scale scores differ because the distribution of racist and sexist attitudes as measured by the particular scale items used was significantly different in the sample of students studied. The same explanation applies to the differences between the cutting points on these two scales and the economic traditionalism scale. For this reason, the terms "high" and "low" as applied to scores on these scales refer to scale scores relative to the other students in the sample. They can not be seen as either high or low in an absolute sense.

Economic traditionalism is shown to be related to sexism in Table 2. Students ranking high on economic traditionalism were much less likely to

INSERT TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

receive a relatively low score on the sexism scale than students ranking low on economic traditionalism. The relationship between economic traditionalism and racism as portrayed in Table 3 is not as clear as the relationship between economic traditionalism and sexism, although it is still statistically significant. The main difference is between the students in the lowest category of scores on the economic traditionalism scale and all the other categories of students combined.

As a result of the examination of the zero order correlations between all of the variables included in the questionnaire, the theoretical model was expanded to include gender, religion, religiosity, urbanism, political conservatism, and family income as causal variables, and the entire model was evaluated using path analysis. The results of that analysis appear in Figure 2, which shows only paths of $\pm$.05 or more. Urbanism does not appear at all in the model, and religion and religiosity appear only as direct effects on sexism. As might be expected, gender has a rather strong direct path to sexism and it also has an indirect path through racism. The multiple correlation of all model variables with sexism is .58, which signifies that 34 percent of the variance in attitudes toward women is explained by the model.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Aside from these additions to the model, there are three basic changes in the relationships between the core variables. First, family income has only very weak paths to economic traditionalism and racism. This may be due to the fact that few students from the working class were part of the sample, so the variability in family income was minimized. The second change is that economic traditionalism has unexpectedly weak paths to racism and sexism. The direct path to sexism is only .09 and the path to racism is not shown in Figure 2 because it is less than .05. Finally, self-reported political conservatism turned out to be more significant than had been hypothesized in the original model. It has relatively strong paths to racism, economic

traditionalism, and through them, to sexism. In addition, it has a direct path to sexism that is stronger than any of the other paths in the model except for the path from gender to sexism.

In the original model, economic traditionalism was seen as being causally prior to both racism and sexism, and racism was also taken to be causally prior to sexism. There are some variables, such as gender, which clearly come first in time, and which must be seen as causally prior in a relationship that is not spurious. With racism and sexism, this is not the case. Instead, racism was posited as causally prior to sexism. One reason for this is that it was assumed to be a stronger, more negative prejudice (an assumption that did not hold in the student population studied). Racial differences correspond more closely than sexual differences to the in-group/out-group dichotomy that is part of every person's world view. Few men see all or nearly all women as being members of a hostile and/or undesirable out-group, a statement that can not be made about relations between blacks and whites in the United States. A second reason for assuming that racism is causally prior to sexism is that the use of racism as an ideological support for the maintenance of a pool of inexpensive laborers to be used as needed in the American economy occurred prior to the use of sexism for the same purpose. Because of the shakiness of this assumption, an alternative path analysis was performed with attitudes toward women being causally prior to racism rather than the reverse. This model turned out to be weaker than the model first proposed, and was discarded.

A final bit of data analysis was designed to probe how the theoretical model, as modified after being subjected to path analysis, impacted behavior. Actual behavior was not measured in the study, but respondents were asked about their behavioral intentions on several dimensions having some relevance

to the model. These were willingness to live in a coeducational residence hall (which is to some degree a measure of social distance toward the opposite sex) and willingness to cohabit with a member of the opposite sex (which combines minimal social distance with sexual liberalism). An additional step was added to the path analysis to include these variables, first for willingness to live in a coeducational residence hall and then for willingness to cohabit heterosexually. Table 4 presents the direct path coefficients for these two variables, as well as the multiple correlations. The strongest direct path to willingness to live in a coeducational residence hall is from political conservatism, followed by gender and sexism. The multiple correlation is .32, which means that the model is explaining only 11 percent of the variance in willingness to live coeducationally. For willingness to cohabit heterosexually, the strongest direct path is from religiosity

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INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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followed by sexism, gender, religion, political conservatism and family income. The multiple correlation is considerably stronger for willingness to cohabit heterosexually than for willingness to live in a coeducational residence hall (.51 to .32), and 26 percent of the variance in willingness to cohabit heterosexually is explained by the model. Since information on the path coefficients for earlier steps in the model is given in Figure 2, it is not repeated here.

DISCUSSION

It is the position of this investigator that racism and sexism are generically similar. Both spring from the same psychological characteristics (authoritarianism, dogmatism, need to scapegoat, etc.), both are facilitated by easily observable physical characteristics, and both play the same structural role in the economy of modern societies. Because racism and, more recently, sexism have been useful in maximizing profits for the upper classes, it was initially assumed that the philosophy of economic traditionalism, which directly states the ideology of maximum profits, would be strongly associated with and causally prior to racism and sexism. Two other variables were seen as conditioning economic traditionalism: a general measure of political conservatism, and family income. Family income was construed as placing individuals in the hierarchy of social strata that make up American society.

Family income, as an index of social class, was an important variable in the model because it was the only direct linkage postulated between social structure and the other four variables in the core of the model. All four of these other variables were conceived of as cultural, ideological, and social psychological - shared conceptions of the world rather than the properties of individual personality systems. The weakness of family income in the path analysis leaves the model without any strong linkage to the structural relationships in society which presumably underlie ideologies such as racism and sexism.

We have already mentioned that the sample used in the study was not an ideal one in that students from the lower class were poorly represented, thus diminishing variability on this dimension. In addition, it is probable that family income was not a sufficiently sensitive indicator of social class. Perhaps a combination of family income with parental education and occupation

would have yielded more meaningful results. Another possibility is that the expansion of the middle class and the culturally aggressive policies of many major corporations may have diffused elements of economic traditionalism and political conservatism so much that it is no longer possible to assume an invariant linkage between these ideological variables and class position in American society. In any case, the paths between ideological variables in the model (up to - .26) are slightly stronger than the paths between ideological variables and behavioral intentions (up to .23), which are, in turn, stronger than paths between the structural variable of family income and either ideological variables or behavioral intentions (up to -.13).

It is important to remember that the multiple correlation between all of the variables in the model and sexism is .58. Nearly two-thirds of the variance in sexism is left unexplained by the model. Although the data presented in this paper tell us a great deal about the relationship between anticedent ideologies and sexism, they do not begin to exhaust the possibilities for explaining sexism.

The zero order relationships and the path analysis have given modest support to the idea that racism and sexism arise out of the same constellation of anticedent variables. One interesting consequence of this is that theoretical insights that have been developed about racism may have much to say about sexism. A useful future project would be to scour the literature on racism for material that would increase our understanding of the way in which sexism is generated and used to keep women "in their places." Another consequence is that the extensive literature on techniques for the reduction of racism, with its failures and its successes, can be used to inform our attempts to reduce the incidence and effects of sexism.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have attempted to show that sexism is, to a certain extent, an outgrowth of racism and a group of three other variables indexing social class, general conservatism, and economic traditionalism. A simplistic interpretation of this analysis is that a significant part of the sexism that is found in America is contributed by a group of people who are also relatively high on racism, and who no doubt also have other similar characteristics. Such an interpretation is not entirely consistent with the data from the path analysis. Figure 2 shows that the direct path from political conservatism is stronger than any other direct path except for the one from gender to sexism. The configuration of the variables and the path coefficients in Figure 2 point to a situation in which a general conservatism that is widespread in American society is an underlying causal element in both racism and sexism, and that, in addition to the direct path to sexism, it has important indirect paths to sexism through both racism and economic traditionalism. The bifurcated view of people as racist or not racist, sexist or not sexist, and politically conservative or liberal should be replaced by one in which it is recognized that these are continuous variables that are present to a greater or lesser extent in all Americans. An examination of the frequency distributions and bivariate tables suggests the generalization that sexism varies more directly with the general level of racism, economic traditionalism and political conservatism in society than with the number of individuals who are identified as highly racist, economically traditionalist or politically conservative.

The data reported in this paper do not provide a definitive answer to the question of the relationship between racism and sexism. The preliminary study reported in this article should be replicated in a sample of American adults with careful attention given to the use of multiple measurements of social

class. This replication would show whether the model proposed here is viable in the general American population and would also provide additional evidence on the continuous distribution of responses on all of the social psychological variables in the model.

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Figure 1: Initial Theoretical Model

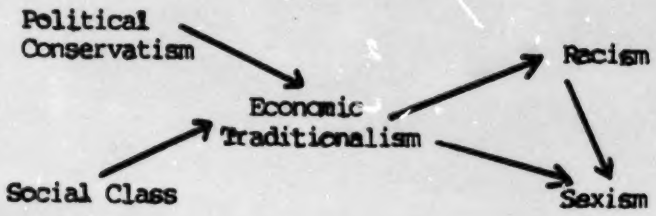

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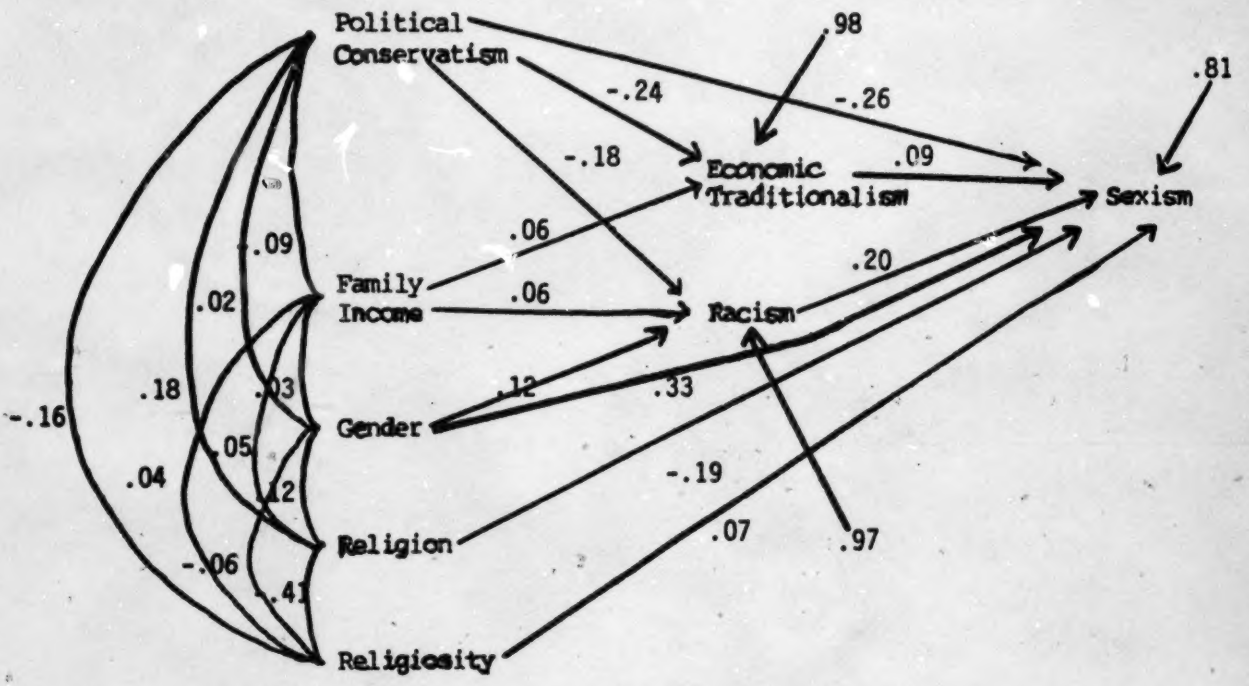
Figure 2: Path Analysis of Sexism with Racism, Economic Traditionalism, Political Conservatism, Family Income, Gender, Religion and Religiosity[1]



[1]Shows only path coefficients greater than ±.05; non-causal zero order correlations between anticedent variables are indicated by curved lines.

Table 1. The Relationship Between Racism and Sexism

	Racism			
Sexism	Under 20 (low)	20-23	24-27	Over 27 (high)
Under 25 (low)	40%	27%	12%	5%
25-30	37%	39%	40%	19%
31-36	15%	27%	32%	48%
Over 36 (high)	8%	7%	16%	28%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	134	143	134	98

$X^2 = 95.5379$, $p < .001$

Table 2. The Relationship Between Economic Traditionalism and Sexism

	Economic Traditionalism			
Sexism	Under 30 (low)	30-34	35-39	Over 39 (high)
Under 25 (low)	38%	26%	18%	10%
25-30	33%	35%	35%	37%
31-36	22%	26%	31%	40%
Over 36 (high)	7%	13%	16%	14%
Total	100%	100%	100%	101%*
N	100	171	147	93

$x^2 = 55.3555$, $p < .001$

*Where %'s do not add to 100, it is due to standard rounding procedures

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Table 3. The Relationship Between Economic Traditionalism and Racism

	Economic Traditionalism			
Racism	Under 30 (low)	30-34	35-39	Over 39 (high)
Under 20 (low)	41%	24%	22%	24%
20-23	34%	28%	24%	32%
24-27	14%	32%	25%	30%
Over 27 (high)	11%	17%	29%	14%
Total	100%	101%*	100%	100%
N	98	170	146	92

$x^2 = 41.1753$, $p < .01$

*Where %'s do not add to 100, it is due to standard rounding procedures

Table 4. Direct Path Coefficients of Selected Variables and Two Types of Behavioral Intentions

	Willingness to Live in a Coeducational Residence Hall	Willingness to Cohabit Heterosexually
Political conservatism	-.21	-.14
Family income	.02	-.13
Gender	-.17	-.16
Religion	.00	-.15
Religiosity	.05	.23
Urbanization	-.01	-.03
Economic traditionalism	.02	-.10
Racism	.02	-.02
Sexism	.09	.19
(Multiple correlation)	(.32)	(.51)

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